



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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2005 Proves to Be Above-Average Year for Salmon Returns in the Columbia

As the year 2005 comes to an end, fish counts at Bonneville Dam will be moderately above average for adult salmon returns in the Columbia Basin with just over 569,000 Chinook and 315,000 steelhead passing the dam by early December. Coho returns (83,000) are also above average and sockeye returns (73,000) even stronger.

The numbers were reported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service).

The ten-year average for Chinook is about 528,000, for steelhead 312,000, coho 81,000 and sockeye 54,000. While spring Chinook counts were actually lower than average in 2005, summer and fall Chinook adult returns were above average, bringing the total count for the year higher. In a typical year, about 80 percent of all returning adults are of hatchery origin.

Government biologists said that the numbers reflect improvements to salmon habitat and to hydropower dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers on the one hand, and slowly declining ocean conditions that may have dampened adult returns on the other.

"Certainly we didn't expect to see the remarkable, record-breaking numbers of a few years ago, when highly favorable ocean conditions helped boost returns," said Bob Lohn, head of the NOAA Fisheries Northwest regional office in Seattle. "But these numbers are quite respectable"

Because ocean conditions are so influential on the rate of adult returns, yet are essentially beyond human control, government biologists say that the timing of the arrival of juveniles in the seawater environment may be crucial. A survival advantage is likely to accrue to young fish that arrive at the mouth of the Columbia when they are sufficiently mature to adapt to seawater, are big enough to avoid being eaten and conditions in the river mouth and ocean are optimal for feeding.

Scientists say they are trying to learn more about this timing and how to take advantage of it to increase adult returns by adjusting the arrival time of juveniles in the estuary so that it is not too early and not too late.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov

NOAA: www.noaa.gov

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office: <http://noaa.chesapeakebay.net>

FEP Document: http://noaa.chesapeakebay.net/docs/FEP_DRAFT.pdf